



Between solar and lunar hero: a cartographic study of Brazilian Olympic athletes in the social imaginary

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Abstract

Sport, understood as a social phenomenon and object of research, brings together the efforts of the most diverse fields of academic knowledge production. In the present paper, we propose a cartographic study of the images that are present in the biographical narratives of four Brazilian Olympic athletes, exploring their interconnections, subtleness and ambiguities. We defend that the study of the images of the nocturnal heroes, normally placed in the background by media processes, can act as important amplifier for the understanding of the complexities that constitutes the social imaginary of the sport phenomenon. Our argument is that, in their trajectories, these athletes manifest solar, lunar and “in between” hero experiences. The theoretical framework connects three previous studies: the research on the theme of the nocturnal hero; Rubio’s investigation on “Brazilian Olympic Heroes”; and the cartographic method for the investigation on the processes of image and imaginaries’ creation proposed by Leao.

Keywords

Social imaginary 1 | Hero 2 | Sport 3 | Cartography 4 | Brazil 5 |

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1. Introduction

Hero, the name given by Homer to the men who possess courage and superior merits, the favorites of the gods; for Hesiod, they are the children born of a union between god and mortal. According to Vernant (1988), heroes are warriors that fought and died in battle, a race considered to be more just and also more valuable in combat. The fair warrior who, acknowledging his own limits, accepts to be subjugated to the superior order of the dike opposes the warrior, who by his own nature is oriented to *hýbris*. The hero, frequently honored by his community for his deeds, is remembered through oral tradition, and is represented through a moral or physical perspective, depending on the storytelling's objective. Therefore, he is preserved, and often associated with a feeling of sacredness and expressed through affection, in opposition to rationality. The connection with the hero can be made through a relationship of values, by identifying one's interior "self" with the outside world, which makes a person who is away from the battlefield or the sports environment feel attached to the one whom he admires, satisfying his conditioned need to avoid isolation and moral loneliness (Fromm, 2001). In other words, this archetype has a psychological meaning for the individual - in his effort to identify and affirm his personality - and for society - in its analogous need to establish a collective identity.

Sport has been transformed into spectacle by the multiplication of media channels, and thus is at a prominent place among contemporary social phenomena for the emergence of heroic attitudes. Its main protagonist, the athlete, inspires an inevitable approach with the myth of the hero, who is used as a reference for the projection of someone who has faced the toughest trials and the worst enemies, and so possesses the victory mark. However, even if his achievements are grandiose and attain a secular record, the quest pursued by this being has a high cost. Andrews and Jackson (2001) understand sport as a metanarrative: media narrates sports events turning them into stories with stars, characters heroes and villains. Strategically positioned in this process of audience construction are national and patriotic issues, revealed through discursive practices that touch on questions of public and national identity. As such, it is necessary to be aware of appeals like "we win or we will win" or "our athletes" are competing to win, widely used by television broadcasters.

The mythical reference of the hero has been widely employed to justify competitive attitudes. In the specific case of sport, which stands out as one of the most visible cultural manifestations, this reference gains extra strength, since the maxim for the athlete is to win. Protagonist of the sport spectacle, the athlete is a beloved public figure, respected and utilized as a reference for having encountered the hardest tests and the toughest opponents, sometimes winning, sometimes losing, but always fighting until he has depleted his resources. However, though these feats may be



grandiose and gain a secular record, the quest for an ideal is costly for those who venture to carry it out.

Escaping from the narratives that focus on the pattern of the daytime hero, there are other kinds of narratives that present the athlete who sacrifices their chances of victory through actions that favor the success of a teammate, who will be recognized at the end of the competition. Every vigorous, competitive action charges the athlete the ultimate price for his life and career: the sacrifice of his agonistic impulse. This manner of competing reinforces and values the heroic character of the athlete (Veloso, 2017). By becoming a *sacrificial worker*, as defined by Brewer (2002), this athlete, in his sacrifice, abnegates his chance of emerging victorious, the greatest desire of those who dedicate their lives to achieve first place.

In order to follow this line of questioning, we selected four Brazilian Olympic athletes. Departing from their *narrative biographies* (Rubio, 2016), our intention is sought to capture their souls in the moment of the creation of the narrative biographical flow that recreates and re-signifies its own history through the elements of high personal reverberation coming from the memorial substratum.

At first, accessing the biographical narratives of these athletes suggested that their path had been similar to the myth of the solar hero, the one structured in the daytime image scheme, in the process of becoming athletes who lived, or live, the dimension of high performance competitive sports. However, when conducting a deeper analysis of its symbolic structure with the input of Durand's theories, counterpoints and dialectic relations between the *image schemes* proposed by him started to appear (Durand, 1963).

One of those counterpoints would be allocated in the structure of the hero's path, when taking into consideration the process of the nuclear structure of the monomyth proposed by Campbell (2008), and later related to the *Athlete and the Hero Myth*, by Rubio (2001; 2004). It can be analyzed through the structure of the archetype of the solar hero, who comprises the daytime image scheme in his noble act of self-giving, and in his path to become a hero, and even consider his metaphorical death within the limits of the game, which are allocated in the mythical and dramatic structures of the nocturnal images scheme. The repetition of mythical dimensions that suggest the singular adventure and the forecast that one would find those steps verifies the need for all of them to follow the path required to compete at the highest level of a modality within a common sport structure.

Until this point, at the entrance of an initiatory adventure, it is possible to project onto these athletes the anthropological path of an ideal that is headed towards the hero archetype. This path, observed through Durand's structuring of an ideal (1963), is composed by an ascending dominant stance, ruled by a daytime images scheme from which the *heroic* structure derives. It is the common path of the athlete-hero, who tries to fulfill a desire-to-be, and wields the weapons he has to face a battle he believes can be won.

However, the act and the activity of competitive praxis that underlies the trajectory of *domestique* athletes in cycling, reserves or poorly ranked promotes a change in the



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dominant posture that favors the transition, inversion or change in the point of observation of the affective content of images to a regime of nocturnal images, characterized by images of falling, descent, swallowing, where mythic and dramatic structures are encountered. In this text, we will address the relations between the image of sacrifice in the condition of the domestique, a reserve athlete and a poorly ranked athlete with the structures of mythic narratives that substantiate this subject, over the course of their journey.

The cartography of the imaginary of these athletes points to the image of the sacrificial athlete, the one who practices self-giving to contribute to the solar hero triumph. However, sacrifice is stripped from the heroic signifier when observed in isolation, in the nobility of settling one's own life for another one. These structures, when examined through the anthropological path of the imaginary proposed by Durand (1963), and externalized through biographical narratives, point to something the author considered as a *synthetic*, or *dramatic* structure, sustained and located in what is called the *nocturnal image scheme*. The *synthetic* structure is characterized by the reconciliation of the abyssal horrors of the nocturnal scheme, in images that refer to, for example, the coziness of the bottom of a goblet at the end of a fall into the abyss. The *dramatic* structure of the condition of these athletes will synthesize and reconcile images that are common to the archetype and the trajectory of the hero who comes from the diurnal scheme, adding to the images of nocturnal substance and mystic content. In this path, the values of the hero and the mysticism and transcendence of death will be synthesized in a kind of sacrificial hero – which belongs in the nocturnal image scheme.

The biographical narratives presented here take into consideration the insertion, dynamics and transformation of these athletes, in the face of all the structural effects to which Olympic sport was exposed during the course of the 20th century, such as spectacularization, professionalization, power disputes, and the transformation of the body and the athlete into merchandise. These narratives present points of tension and relationship between the image scheme of *diurnal* and *nocturnal* in the cartography of the imaginary of these subjects. These points suggest the expansion of the relationship between the athlete and the hero myth beyond the “classical” interpretation of the warrior hero of the diurnal scheme.

The relationship between the athlete and the spectacular figure of the hero occurs since Antiquity, when competitions were called athletic practices and not sport. The capacity to face danger and the unknown, the fearlessness in combat, and the incessant pursuit of proposed objectives resembles the trajectory of the athlete who experienced the competitive experience since the end of the 19th century and that points to one of the defining aspects of sport: its agonistic character, which is present in the myth since its creation. Agonism is like an extension of the hero's struggles on the battlefield, since even in *agón* the contenders make use of instruments, and depending on the strife, they expose themselves to death, though, in theory, agonism does not aim to eliminate the opponent (Rubio, 2001).



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Myth and history, just like myth and sports, are intertwined since the early beginning, but the relationship between them remains inseparable even considering the transformations humanity has undergone over the past four thousand years. One of the main elements of the identification of the athlete with the hero myth can be credited to his capacity and disposition to face danger and the unknown, his fearlessness in combat and the relentless pursuit of the goals proposed to this uncommon being. The experiencing of the hero archetype by the athlete is lived in all its strength in the many situations in which his virtues are put to the test, in demonstrations of strength and courage. And it is undeniable that it is at the peak of the podium, in the celebration of an achievement, that the rite reaffirms the myth, and the athlete becomes hero.

In sport, this representation is amplified because it enables to representation of the possibility of becoming. Already consecrated athletes had to, inevitably, follow a common path and realize feats in a determined moment that elevated them to a level distinct from their peers, becoming examples to those younger than them and the object of admiration to those older, thus reaching a position of national or international idols.

The athlete approaches the hero myth by being identified as a rare being, one among thousands, to enjoy prestige and social projection since it is minimal the portion of the population that practices sport and is able to attain levels of performance and exhibition that justify its idol status. This extraordinary condition, that inevitably involves overcoming limits, makes the athlete a target of identifications, leading him to be adored by his fans, and respected and feared by his opponents. Just as the image of the hero has evolved to reflect the various stages of development of the human personality, sport has also transformed throughout the history of mankind (Rubio, 2001). If considered in this way, the hero-athlete of Antiquity still exerts great influence on the construction of the heroic condition of the athlete of the Modern Era Olympic Games, in spite of the transformations that occurred in the function and the role played by this character in social life.

Acknowledged as those who stand out amongst the strongest, fastest and most skillful, who are able to overcome every obstacle to be victorious, ultimately prototypes of almost perfect creatures, athletes who attain the highest place on the podium usually live under solitary, tough and monotonous conditions in their own point of view, but are deemed by the general public to have a life full of privileges and perks. An athlete's career isn't only the result of individual talents and willingness, of the affirmation of a latent desire or the determination to strive for goals. Countless social and environmental factors can influence this journey that transforms an aspiring sportsman into an athlete. Once the trajectory is initiated, other elements add up to this and allocate the athlete among those who have fame and status, and become the present reference of the sport both for those who are aspiring to have a sports career, and the great public, who needs victorious and successful characters in their construction of a sports imaginary and for the endless pursuit of their own objectives.



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Subject to an exhausting routine of training and matches, the athlete sees himself surrounded by issues such as the absence of contact with his family, overexposure in the media, and the impossibility of admitting – to himself and to his audience – his fragilities, distresses, and uncertainties, because even though he is a mythic figure, this contemporary hero does not inhabit the Olympus, nor does he drink ambrosia with the gods; instead, he establishes affective relationships, and struggles with the disorders that surround the life of an athlete who is also a citizen. These situations are experienced and verified during the Olympic Games and during the World championships of the most popular sports in different nations, when sports coverage get a huge space in the media and invades even the lives of those whose are not competition fans (Rubio, 2006). Transposing it to the present date, we have high performance athletes as a kind of hero, for whom sports courts, fields, swimming pools, and running tracks resemble battlefields in the days of major events.

Seen under this light, the athlete approaches the paradigm offered by Pearson (1994), in which the identification with the warrior figure has strength as a goal, courage as a task, and fear as a weakness. And it is not surprising, then, that his life is tragic. Authors such as Russel (1993), Harris (1994), Mangan & Holt (1996) study the athlete's heroic condition in contemporary society, and seek to establish a taxonomy to identify the athlete, pointing as constituent elements to this character the ability to win and satisfy the group's needs, extraordinary performances, social acceptance and a spirit of independence. Such interest is due to the importance that sports gained since the end of last century, with social, economic and psychological developments that have a wide reach, having become a key activity in modern societies, with an own set of values to be observed and analyzed.

Several of these mythologies from early times were conserved throughout time in various ways, carried by artists, through orality or even rites, which helps us organize representations of the world and the relationships between all that is in it. Myths promote the exposure of the archetypes of a collective unconscious, which can be revealed in everyday matters. Sports, understood as one of the world's biggest sociocultural phenomena, are fertile grounds for the unfolding of mythical narratives that resonate the athlete's trajectory, especially when related to the hero myth (Rubio, 2001).

Durand's proposals have unquestionable relevance for the study of the symbolic field and, especially, the symbolic imaginary. Amongst his main contributions, his work to structurally organize symbols in the middle of the 20th century has given them an *anthropological trajectory*, approximated the field of research of sensitivity and the spirit to a formal dimension appreciated by the eastern currents of thought and the academia. In Durand's perspective, the imaginary occupies the dimension of all the capital thought by men. Beyond being a condition that dynamizes the spirit, it is the essence of the body when it integrates the assimilation of reflexes, the limit adaptation of consciousness to objectivity, giving hope to this soul when facing the domains of



mortality (Durand, 1963). In order to give sense to these considerations about the nocturnal athlete, here are presented the trajectories of four Brazilian Olympic athletes.

2. Four Narratives

2.1 *Cezar Wilians Daneliczen*

Born in Cascavel, Paraná, in 1962, César has tried many sports but identified most with cycling. In 1977, when he was 15 years old, he started cycling and competed in the “Lead foot” category. In 1978, participated in the Parana state championship in the third category. In 1980, participated in his first national championship and got the fourth place. He met Pirelli’s coach, Jose de Carvalho, who invited him to join the team - in which he stayed for 10 years. In 1983, he went to Belgium, where he stayed for one year. He participated in the 1983 Pan American Games in Caracas. He participated in the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul. He owns the bike equipment store DKS Bike in Maua, Sao Paulo.

2.2 *Fofão*

Hélia Rogério de Souza Pinto, Fofao’s real name, is part of a family with 8 children, and was born in Sao Paulo, in 1970. As a kid, she often got sick, and so she started to try to engage more in her physical education classes at school. Her teacher noticed her skills and offered her the opportunity to further develop her volleyball skills at the Olympic Training Center in Ibirapuera. In 1985 she turned professional, still as a striker, but was then convinced to switch to become a setter due to her average stature. Her first call to join the national team was already for the senior team, in 1990. In the following year, she won a silver medal in the Pan American Games in Havana and, in 1992, went to the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona. When she returned to her club, she had earned the starter position as a setter for her team, which she would never lose. She got the bronze medal in the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, as a reserve. She participated in the team’s renovation period, was captain for the team that won the gold medal in the Pan American Games in Winnipeg, and got another bronze medal at the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney. She was away from the national team for two years and returned with the arrival of the new coach, Jose Roberto Guimaraes. In the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, she was once again a reserve for the team, which finished fourth in the competition, and after that moved to Italy to play for a club there. In 2006, she returned to the national team to claim back her status as a starter in her position, and finally won a gold medal in the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. She continued to play until 2015, when she decided to end her career as a player. She started to act as a commentator on games that were broadcasted on TV at the Rio 2016



Olympic Games, and now promotes volleyball on behalf of her former sponsor, Banco do Brasil.

2.3 Murilo Fischer

Murilo Fischer was born in 1979 in Brusque, Santa Catarina, and as a kid he liked to ride his bicycle. With some friends in his hometown, he built BMX tracks and started a club called "The Track Hunters". At 16, he got himself a better bike, one that was proper for mountain bike, and started to participate in championships. In 1997, he moved to Jaragua do Sul, and started to win several championships. He went to the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney and, from 2002 to 2003, competed for the Italian team IMA-Brugnotto. He also participated in the Olympic Games in Athens, in 2004, Beijing in 2008, and London in 2012. He is the only Brazilian to have completed two Grand Tours: the *Tour de France* and the *Giro d'Italia*. He is currently competing for the French team *Française des Jeux*.

2.4 Soraia André

Soraia was born in Sao Paulo in 1964, daughter to a boxer. As a kid, she liked music, poetry and rhymes. One day, when she wanted to ask her father for a recorder, she made a rhyme with judo - which was enough for her father to take her to judo classes, against her mother's will, who thought her daughter would risk becoming too "masculine". She began training at 11 years old, in the Associação de Judô Mirim, at a time when there were no judo competitions for women, as judo itself was prohibited for women in Brazil. In her first year of training, she became a national champion, which earned her the right to participate in the World Championship in 1980. She got a bronze medal in the 1983 Pan American Games in Caracas, gold in 1987, in Indianapolis, and bronze in Havana, in 1991. She participated in the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul, when women's Judo was included as an exhibition event. In 1992, she participated in the Olympic Games in Barcelona, when women's judo was finally included in the Olympic program. After complaining her payments were late because resources that had been deviated by the Brazilian Judo Federation, she was excluded from the national team. As a form of protest, she dyed her kimono black as a sign of mourning, and subsequently quit her career as an athlete. She graduated in Physical Education and started to work for the Santo Andre township, as a judo teacher. At the time of the interview, when she was 48, she was studying Psychology.

3. About the method of cartography of imaginaries

The research with imaginaries demands profound epistemological changes in research modes. It is no longer enough to use simplifying models of inquiry, based on so called classic scientific methodology, which holds as its main elements the neutrality



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and objectivity, founded on the separation of subject and object, emphasizes the need for experiments and tests, looks for absolute scientific truth and generalizations.

To study imaginaries is, before anything, to see phenomena through other logics and relations, to look for the “betweens” that hide in multiplicities. As we think of imaginaries in the shifts they produce, the narratives they articulate, and the affections they trigger, they become landscapes under construction.

In other words, more than being an object of study to be analyzed in dissociated parts, the concept of imaginary that is adopted in this paper, which communes with some of Durand’s propositions, is grounded on a systemic and complex perspective. Thus, choosing a method required different approaches that allowed the understanding of the imaginary as a complex phenomenon that takes place in a network and is under constant transformation.

In our understanding, cartography is a processual form of observation, open to complexities, uncertainties and to the ever-changing nature through which the universe of mythical narratives is established in the network that produces knowledge and culture. Starting from this premise, we have developed a cartography method as a research proposal, which comprehends the imaginaries in their fluid and multidimensional dynamics.

As we have already previously affirmed, this method proposal is grounded on the concepts of cartography and rhizome created by Deleuze and Guattari (Leão, 2017). Let us make a preamble to present their main ideas before we dive into the method of cartography of imaginaries itself.

According to French thinkers, philosophy’s role extends way beyond simply retrieving ideas from ancient philosophers. For them, to philosophize is, before anything, to invent new concepts that challenge the ways in which philosophy is written and formulated. Following this purpose, Deleuze and Guattari revisited territories of science, literature and history, among others, in an adventure of interdisciplinary nature. In the course, they forged a myriad of new conceptions like rhizome, cartography, schizoanalysis, pragmatic, diagram and micropolitics. These concepts and intimately imbricated and constitute the basis of the books *The Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*.

In general terms, and focusing on some of the principles of the rhizomatic structures proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (connection, heterogeneity, multiplicity), it is possible to say that the cartographic method is in accordance with such principles. Cartography aims to find connections, illuminate heterogeneities and understand the dynamics of multiplicities.

Here it is important to remember that, for Deleuze and Guattari, the concept of multiplicity indicates the rejection and overcoming of dualisms that are typical in eastern culture, such as one/multiple, inside/outside, nature/history, body/mind, among others. To think through cartographic processes is, before anything, to understand that behind each dualism it is possible to find opposing pairs, which are complementary and indissociable. The cartographic act, understood as a creative



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activity to produce knowledge, counterpoints the idea of tracing, or mere graphic representation:

The rhizome is altogether different, a map and not a tracing. Make a map, not a tracing. The orchid does not reproduce the tracing of the wasp; it forms a map with the wasp, in a rhizome. What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980:12)

Thus, the cartographic act is the art of weaving unforeseen relations, an exercise of searching for different entries and a nomad choice for detours. Above all, the cartographic act is not a reproduction of the object of study, but the building of a system, which is alive, open, connectable and capable of receiving constant transformations.

In short, our argument is that the imaginary should be studied as a rhizome; this is, as a network in a continuous process of reorganization and, in that sense, using the cartography procedures is also a choice for an open road, which is a risky proposal however essential to the studies of imaginaries.

Dealing with the perspective of imaginary proposed by Durand demands the exercise of apprehending the whole of a common and pathological imaginary, which echoes and repeats itself exhaustively in a canonic manner in the total valences of culture, which proposes history, mythical narratives, arts, ethnology, linguistics and literature. With the intention of unveiling the imaginary of these athletes, we have opted to, as a theoretical ground, betake the perspective of the subject's *trajectory*. Durand's proposal presents the imaginary as an instance for mediation, of symbolic production, in the individual's relationship with the world and the collective around him. In that sense, the author suggests a path of feedback between the subject and his environment, in all its aspects, where he founds the anthropological investigation of the imaginary, coining the concept/method of the *anthropological path of the imaginary* (Durand, 1963).

As we will see in cartographies and in their relations with the social imaginary, understanding Olympic athletes according to the proposal of trajectory built on their biographical narratives, is a path that has the potential to unveil sensitive movements, myths and archetypes.

4. Cartographies of the Imaginary

Cezar's sacrificial condition consolidated itself when his sports trajectory reached international limits and gave him a different perspective of the level of competition he knew. In contrast, his teammates elected for the victory attempt would require even more of his energy and possibilities of winning for them to achieve their particular individual triumph. However, the individual consecration of the victor alone, where



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the blood of the domestique' self-immolation is not acknowledged for the podium, solidified in Cezar his moral structures and strength of resignation.

Afterwards, in 1983, I participated in the championship, the Pan American Games held in Venezuela, I also took part in the endurance race, I also had to work for other athletes that, in fact, there were the people who were more of an elite, who were the favorites, and I was still young, so I had to sacrifice myself for the other folks to shine, for them to win a medal or something, but it's very gratifying to work for a friend, for a teammate, and see him shine, win a medal, so it is good.

Like a good domestique athlete, Cezar even protected his teammates from the news of the team's termination. On the eve of another edition of the Olympic Games, Pirelli started to write the last lines of its history in sports, deactivating some projects. The Pirelli cycling team was in Argentina participating in the Volta de Mendoza, and its members were away from the events that were taking place in Brazil. Like "from dust to dust", his wife told him of the bad news over the phone, about which she found out from the news on TV. The team was having a great performance, and at that very same moment Cassio de Paiva was fighting for the first places, in addition to Cezao winning one of the legs of the competition.

Provided with the moral aegis, common to the spirit of domestique cyclists, he protected teammates once more shielding them from the disastrous news during the competition. By not allowing the news to spread, he allowed the flame in their teammates' soul to stay lit. When they returned to Brazil, they verified the veracity of this fact. Pirelli's trajectory with cycling had come to an end. Without the company's banner, the team still tried to stay together and participated in events to try to survive, and in hopes of being adopted by new sponsors. However, this was indeed the end of the road, and it was necessary to let it go to let new things arise.

Durand, when observing the constellations of images, noticed their agglutination in two orientation groups, and the distinctions in their characteristics of semantic grounds. While following the morphology, characteristic of forming constellations, he noticed that one of their centers pointed to the splitting of the universe into opposing logics, good and evil, light and dark, etc. The other center points to unity, harmony and dialectic production, to the *topos* reached by light, debate that splits once illuminated. Its opposite comprises the nocturnal regime, which promotes the unifying and conciliatory night of terror from the dark abyss to the coziness of the drowsy body in its bowl-shaped background.

The judo athlete Soraia faced discrimination for several years when judo was prohibited for women, and also for being black. She went from spectator to protagonist, when the law was finally amended and allowed her to participate in the Seoul Olympic Games in 1988. Her ranking below what was expected was the perfect excuse to reject her for the following Olympic cycle:



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Life almost turned into death. Athletes are like merchandise, once they no longer serve, they are thrown away. The Olympic Games were over, the dispute for the third place was over, and I had lost. For my coach, it was as if I no longer existed. And so, I spent the whole night wandering around the Olympic Village. I was up all night, with suicidal thoughts.

After overcoming this moment of agony, she once again earned a spot for the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona. And, once this competition was over, when she turned 29, she received the news from the Brazilian Judo Federation that female athletes over 29 years old could no longer compete at the Olympic level. At the moment she realized meant her death in the sport, the hero of the nocturnal scheme manifested herself by dyeing her kimono black to participate in her last fights. As a characteristic of the nocturnal hero, Soraia harmonized with the images and of the synthetic structure, in the experience of facing death.

The structuring of Durand's imaginary gathers around original *schèmes*, proposes procedural norms very well outlined and with relative stability among the dimensions involved. The schèmes represent the most abstract dimension of the dynamic of symbols organization. They have the driving energy, like the action of verbs and articulate themselves to the archetypes to give shape to the "fundamental intentions" and presuppose the existence of an isomorphism of schèmes, archetypes and symbolic representations that substantiate the myths and the constellations of images. For example, driving power: to fight, to face, to overcome. Archetype: hero. Symbol: the Olympic athlete. That is, the organization of schèmes, archetypes, symbols and myths of a certain culture, will guide its development.

Durand, in his intent to organize and schematize the symbolic material collected from the inventory of diverse cultures, perceived two fundamental poles of organization of images: one of binary characteristics, of established opposites, like shadow and light, and another one that reconciles and "harmonizes" these same poles. The first dimension concentrates the images in a diurnal regime, characterized by light and rationality. The other pole concentrates the images in a nocturnal regime characterized by the absence of light, at night, however, unifying and harmonizing (Durand, 1963).

Murilo Fisher is certainly the main name of Brazilian cycling (at a professional level), for having consolidated himself as a domestique professional in Europe for more than a decade. This has established, in the athlete's understanding, a solid work relationship, earned and perceived as victorious for reaching that point. For the athlete, becoming a professional means victory:

... to be Brazilian and get to the professional level in Europe is beyond hard. In Brazil's history, there have been five or six professional athletes, among 200 million inhabitants. It is very different from soccer players. We have to put ourselves in the spotlight, so beyond all my titles, having become professional is certainly my biggest victory.



The most common hermeneutic action in relation to the Olympic athlete implies its dynamics of symbolic organization in the heroic structure. Constellated by symbols of luminosity, ascension, verticality and weapons of schism and purification, this intention composes the morphology of the athlete-hero in the adventure of the great achievement within the space of the competitive game. This composition of social imagery is vastly reinforced and propagated by the type of social organization that Debord (1967) called *society of the spectacle*.

The search for positions in the main team is one of the characteristics of the solar hero, in sports. However, it is part of the dynamics of some collective sports, such as volleyball, to wait for the opportunity to claim this spot and retain it. Fofão was an athlete who waited for 7 years for the opportunity to take this spot. Her strategy was to carry on working hard, harder than the other athletes. After conquering the desired position, she was disqualified by the new coach, who denied her the possibility of participating in a decisive match that could have not only yielded her a medal, but also the dignity of collaborating with the team. According to Fofão:

There were days when I would say: 'I don't want to be here, I don't want to be a part of this.' I shouldn't have gone, because I wasn't actually there, I wasn't being useful. I don't accept to be in a group just for the sake of being there. And this may be one of my biggest regrets. I was forgotten, and that stuck with me.

To admit her mistake, persist in her career, assess the conditions and be once again summoned to participate in what would be the achievement of women's volleyball's first gold medal is a rare, if not unprecedented situation, at the level of Olympic sports, which is possible only for those who effectively experience a downfall as a possibility for redemption.

The structures of the nocturnal scheme, as mentioned earlier, in the space of logic that is opposed to the diurnal scheme, strive to merge and harmonize. For Durand, the nocturnal scheme sees the heroic fall as a downfall and the abyss as the bottom of a cup, which will comfort and cuddle the body of the fallen.

It is over this space of images referring to the path of the athletes, in the absent dimension of "luminous matters", that this study will look. It touches the inner components and images of these subjects, a forgotten or hidden space of the social imaginary, underexplored by the society of the spectacle, which is more attentive to reinforcing the imperatives of victory. Unveiling the nocturnal scheme of these athletes' imaginary, who are longed for by their community as heroes, brings us closer to, for example, lines of moral and ethical tensions in themselves and before a collective, in dealing with pain and, above all, with defeat.

5. Conclusions



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This paper has developed a cartography of the dynamics that accompany the athlete's narratives and their relationship with the hero myth. In our trajectory, it was possible to find deep structures, challenges and ambiguities that accompany the communication processes of the athlete-hero. According to our argument, even though the majority of narratives in the media are focused on heroes who conform to Durand's diurnal scheme, it is possible to undertake a study that goes against this approach. More than this, we deem it to be imperative that scientific research about life narratives in sports start to endeavor in the nocturnal imaginaries, their shadows and territories yet to be discovered.

Studying the nocturnal hero is a challenge that takes us away from the comfort of absolute truths, from certainties that separate right from wrong, and from dualist narratives that operate in a downsized way in the ambit of actions like distinguishing and discriminating. In the logic that orients, it is all very simple, as it is grounded on the idea of competition. The intent to win is basic, and victories are the measuring system for your actions.

The research that allows itself to go down nocturnal territories is, before anything, a research that faces the issues of mixtures, which understands phenomena as live networks, and acknowledges the importance of acts like unifying, associating, relating and intertwining. The nocturnal hero is a hero who values this "being in conjunction", "belonging to a team". At times like the one we are at, when productivity, results and data are overrated, it is paramount to rescue a perspective that goes against such values, and which has the courage to explore other territories, those of values renegade in the social imagery.

It is no coincidence that media is a desert completely stripped of documents and speeches that carry the memories of the nocturnal hero. However, it is necessary to emphasize that such scarcity is no excuse for scientific researches to dodge such matters. On the contrary, it is the media landscape deprived of nocturnal narratives that refuses to continue to absorb more solar athletes. As the painters of the Renaissance knew so well, it takes shadows for the light to shine. Thus, the demand for understanding the role of the night hero is something that goes hand in hand with the restlessness and weariness generated by the very intumescence of the solar thought. In the arrogance - which comes from the excesses and the massive increase of pressure for results and for the surpassing of limits, which are brought to life by the self-affirmation speeches of the solar hero - are inserted the seeds for a different way to understand the sport as a phenomenon that feeds and enriches the social imaginary.

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